I) IN THE CLAIMS:

1.   (Presently amended) A method of operating a reward points
      system in conjunction with a [card] computer network, the
      [card] computer network interconnected to [comprising] at
      least one issuing bank computer operated by an issuing
      bank that issues [for issuing] a card to a user in
      association with a user payment account at the issuing
      bank computer and at least one acquiring bank computer
      operated by an acquiring bank that collects [for
      collecting] payment from the user payment account at the
      issuing bank computer [on behalf of a merchant] and pays
      [paying] the merchant when the user presents the card to
      the merchant in association with a purchase transaction,
      the method comprising the steps of:

      a. providing a reward point account database in a central
         reward server computer that interoperates [operating
         in association] with the [card] computer network, the
         reward point account database storing [central reward
         server enabling a plurality of independently operating
         merchants to each have] a plurality of individual user
         reward point accounts in association with each of a
         plurality of [stored in said reward point account
         database and associated with said] independently
         operating merchants,

      b. a user executing a purchase transaction with a
         transacting merchant selected from said plurality of
         independently operating merchants by presenting the
         card to the transacting merchant [a credit card] for
         payment of at least part of the transaction;

      c. a transacting merchant computer, operating in
         association with the transacting merchant,

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transmitting via the computer network a request to
[requesting] an acquiring bank computer to obtain
approval of said purchase transaction from an issuing
bank computer, said request comprising a user payment
account ID as obtained from the card; and

d. the transacting merchant computer transmitting an
instruction to [instructing] the central reward server
computer to add reward points to a user reward point
account in the reward point account database, the user
reward point account being associated with the
transacting merchant and the user payment account ID.

2. (Presently amended) The method of claim 1 further
comprising the step of redeeming reward points from the
user reward point account by the steps of

the user executing a purchase transaction with a
redeeming merchant;

the user utilizing reward points from at least one
of the user reward point accounts associated with
the user for the purchase transaction;

a redeeming merchant computer associated with the
redeeming merchant transmitting an instruction to
[instructing] the central reward server computer to
reduce the user reward point account associated
with the user by the amount of reward points used
in the transaction.

3. (Presently amended) The method of claim 1 further
comprising the steps of

establishing a reward point exchange account on the
central reward server computer;

selecting reward points from each of a plurality of
user reward point accounts associated with different
independently operating merchants for exchange into the
reward point exchange account; and

the central reward server computer exchanging
[aggregating] the selected reward points into the reward
point exchange account.

4.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 3 further
comprising the step of redeeming aggregated reward points
from the reward point exchange account by the steps of
        the user executing a purchase transaction with a
        redeeming merchant;
        the user utilizing aggregated reward points from
        the reward point exchange account for the purchase
        transaction;
        the reward point exchange account being reduced by
        the number of aggregated reward points utilized for
        the purchase transaction.

5.   (Presently amended) The method of claim 3 comprising the
further steps of:
    establishing a cluster of independently operating
merchants, each of which have user reward point accounts
established with the reward point account database in the
central reward server computer;
    allowing aggregation of points from each of the
independently operating merchants in the cluster into the
reward point exchange account; and
    disallowing aggregation of points from a merchant not
a member of the cluster.

6.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 5 comprising
      the further step of allowing for redemption of aggregated
      reward points only with redeeming merchants that are
      members of the cluster.

7-20 (Cancelled).

21. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2 wherein the
user executes the redemption purchase transaction completely
with reward points from the reward point account.

22. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2 wherein the
user executes the redemption purchase transaction partially with
reward points from the reward point account and partially with
other consideration.

23. (New) A reward points system comprising:
      at least one issuing bank computer interoperable with a
computer network and operated by an issuing bank that issues a
card to a user in association with a user payment account at the
issuing bank computer;
      at least one acquiring bank computer interoperable with the
computer network and operated by an acquiring bank that collects
payment from the issuing bank on behalf of a merchant and pays
the merchant when the user presents the card to the merchant in
association with a purchase transaction;
      at least one transacting merchant computer interoperable
with the computer network and operated by a transacting
merchant, said transacting merchant being one of a plurality of
independently operating merchants;
      a central reward server computer interoperable with the
computer network and comprising a reward point account database

for storing a plurality of individual user reward point accounts in association with each of the plurality of independently operating merchants,

wherein the transacting merchant computer is adapted to

transmit via the computer network a request to the acquiring bank computer to obtain from an issuing bank computer approval of a purchase transaction being executed with a user who has presented a card for payment of at least part of the transaction, said request comprising a user payment account ID as obtained from the card; and

transmit via the computer network an instruction to the central reward server computer to add reward points to a user reward point account in the reward point account database, the user reward point account being associated with the transacting merchant and the user payment account ID.

24. (New) The system of claim 23 wherein the central reward server computer further comprises a reward point exchange account associated with a user and is adapted to (i) enable the selection of reward points from each of a plurality of user reward point accounts associated with different independently operating merchants for exchange into the reward point exchange account, and (ii) exchange the selected reward points into the reward point exchange account.